

The Ballarat Naturalist

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April 5th Meeting Members Images *Wilderness*

Wilderness – The East Coast of Greenland

One definition of “wilderness” defines it by the lack of permanent human settlement and no direct change by humans to the natural ecology of the region. The east coast of Greenland north of Ittoqqotoomiut seems to fit the bill. Having shown maps to point out the decrease in sea ice especially in summer since records began in 1979, and the increasing rate of melt of the Greenland ice sheet, images of sea ice and glaciers were followed by examples of the geology easily seen when there’s no soil or forests. Birds such as Ivory Gull, Long-tailed Jaeger and Arctic Tern breed here in summer; creatures such as Arctic Hare and Ptarmigan become white as winter approaches but with snow arriving later there is a mis-match between their camouflaging colours and their environment. Musk Ox live there all year round. Their outer coat of guard hairs protects a fine layer of wool which is eight times warmer than sheep’s wool and can therefore cope with temperatures of minus 20-30C. Feeding on grass, they must paw aside the covering of snow to reach their food. But the snow season is now shorter with rain falling instead as the climate warms. Overnight the wet ground freezes, any snow already there becomes icy, preventing the Musk Ox from obtaining food. They lose weight, calves may not survive. Tundra plants are low-growing and colourful. Pollinated by insects and wind, they must bloom, set seed and disperse it in 2-3 months before the winter sets in. Micro-climates such as the lee of a boulder, a south-facing slope or the hot waters of geothermal springs determine which plants can grow. There’s grandeur in the landscape of steep slopes interspersed with glaciers and glimpses of the Greenland icesheet high above, with icebergs and ice floes providing habitat for seals and polar bears dependent on a food chain beginning with algae growing on the underside of the floating ice.

It brought to mind a poem of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889):

*What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wildness yet.*

Carol Hall.



Greenland

Claire and Peter Dalman chose to interpret wilderness as Coongie Lakes National Park. To get there, a look at memorials to Burke and Wills ill fated expedition along Cooper Creek, around Innaminka was included. Coongie Lakes are then about 100km north west. These vast lakes host thousands of water birds. It is a Ramsar site. We enjoyed camping, listening overnight to 21 broilgas and hundreds of pink eared ducks swimming nearby. The persistent dingos were not so welcome.



Pink eared duck

Wilderness John Petherham

I asked Google Photos to select photos of ‘Wilderness’ from 1000 photos that I have stored there. [I had no idea of the definition that would be adopted]. The selection seemed to focus on ‘bright colour’, ‘bleakness’ (eg. Snow and Ice) and old B&W shots in Africa, adventure activities (eg. ropes and climbing), views of wild landscape and forest.. The ‘algorithm’ spanned years from 1950s to 2023. I selected 12 slides from the 30 slides on the list
Here are a few examples



Acacia calamifolia (Walowa) with Mt Arapiles, October 2023



Spring colours, Eastern Districts of Zimbabwe. 1975.
from a painting by Joan Evans.



A meeting with tribal leaders, communal land,
Nyanga, Rhodesia 1959



Installing cameras to record flood levels,
Victoria River, NW Australia 2022

A Field Trip to Ditchfield Bushland Reserve/ Nerrina Historic Area

On Sunday 7th April 2024 at 9.45am, eighteen FNCB members assembled at the carpark at the end of Ditchfield Lane, Brown Hill. Under leaden skies, Emily guided the group to the Yarrowee River Trail east of Ditchfield Lane.



Gathering around Les to learn about the Pleated Parasol along the Yarrowee River Trail east of Ditchfield Lane.

This area is a popular birding area, and the group were soon rewarded. Sightings of Superb Fairywrens *Malurus cyaneus* in their “brown suits”, Grey Fantails *Rhipidura albiscapa* dancing around the branches and, for the more experienced eye, the White-naped Honeyeaters *Melithreptus lunatus* and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters *Caligavis chrysops* frequenting the upper branches. A Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax* kept an “eagle eye” on proceedings.

The trail proved to be a popular Sunday morning exercise route for the locals, challenging us with the unfamiliar task of dodging runners, cyclists, dog walkers and a pram whilst our eyes were scanning the branches for additional sightings. Fortunately, the wide mown grassy verges provided safe refuge when our attention was diverted.

Emily pointed out a large Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon* festooned with Drooping Mistletoe *Amyema pendula*. The seed pods from the wattle's last flowering season were still present as well as the grey-blue buds for next season. It was explained that the tree gets a head start on producing the flowers before the weather gets too cold and the glaucous covering insulates the buds.

Members were fascinated with Emily's explanation of the structure of the seed in the pods. Each seed had an "umbilical cord" or funicle wrapped around the seed which provided nutrients to the seed as it developed. When the seed is mature, the funicle dries leaving a starchy food source which is reportedly edible. It was surprising how long the funicle was when unravelled, reaching at least 3cm. Although members preferred to wait for morning tea for their sustenance, the funicle is a food source for ants who will drag it back to their nest and in the process relocate the seed away from the parent tree. Emily introduced some of us to a new scrabble word, myrmecochory which means "dispersed by ants".

Meanwhile, a small, white parasol fungi was found in the grass, obviously quickly out of the blocks after the rain less than a week ago. Les, as usual, was able to produce a name Pleated Inkcap *Parasola plicatilis*, aptly named as it resembled a pleated cocktail umbrella.

The Sweet Bursaria *Bursaria spinosa* was observed in seed. Emily explained the name *Bursaria* comes from the Latin 'bursa', for bag or purse, referring to the purse- or heart-shaped seed capsules. The mature seeds rattle in the purses like coins.

The trail led us to impressive stands of remnant Manna Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis*, Candlebark *Eucalyptus rubida*, and Brown Stringybark *Eucalyptus baxteri*, although the understorey was significantly degraded and smothered by blackberry.

Emily pointed out the Cherry Ballart *Exocarpos cupressiformis* on the hillside noting it was hemiparasitic, as it will photosynthesise, but gains extra nutrients by attaching its roots to host plants. The host plants are thought to include multiple species including grasses. There are very few confirmed reports of successful propagation of Cherry Ballart from seed.

The smaller and less noticed creatures frequenting the lower leaves of the eucalypts did not escape Vireya's keen eye. The Eucalyptus Weevil *Gonipteris*, Eucalyptus Stem Gall Wasp *Leptocybe invasa* and a cluster of caterpillars from the Subfamily *Perginae* were all

observed among others (see the Club's field trip project in iNaturalist for other records).

The group had only traversed a short distance but had been happily occupied for an hour when a desire for morning tea resulted in turning back for the carpark.

A perennial shelf fungus, Southern Bracket *Ganoderma australe*, was spotted on several trees on the way back. Weeping Grass *Microlaena stipoides* and Common Tussock-grass *Poa labillardierei* were also observed.

White-browed Scrubwrens *Sericornis frontalis*, White-throated Treecreeper *Cormobates leucophaea* and the Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus moluccanus* were all added to the bird list.

Emily highlighted a key difference between the Brown Thornbill *Acanthiza pusilla* with a brown back and the Striated Thornbill *Acanthiza lineata* with the olive-grey back. They were both sighted. Confusingly for the novice, they both sport a striated chest, yet again reminding us that the common name can sometimes be a misnomer. By the time the group had returned to the carpark the clouds had cleared and the sun prevailed.



After much-needed refreshment and the shedding of rain jackets, the group then headed off in a south-west direction for a walk through the Ditchfield Bushland Reserve following the Yarrowee River Trail.

In this direction, the Yarrowee River was less infested with blackberries, with grassy areas among the Manna Gums *Eucalyptus viminalis*, Scent-bark *Eucalyptus aromaphloia* and occasional Narrow-leaved Peppermint *Eucalyptus radiata*.

The mid-storey plants included the Hemp Bush *Gynatrix pulchella*, with the stems yielding fine fibre that was used by indigenous people for string, bags and similar. Also recorded were Hop Goodenia *Goodenia ovata*, Prickly Tea-tree *Leptospermum continentale*, and Prickly Moses *Acacia verticillata*.

The Lilac Shelf Fungus *Fomitopsis lilacinogilva*, was observed growing on rotting eucalyptus wood with the lilac colour of the pore surface on the underside of the fruit body.

A Rain Moth *Abantiades atripalpis* was spotted in the lower branches of a Eucalypt, inspired to emerge from its pupal tunnel after the recent heavy autumn rain. These large moths, with a wingspan of up to 16cm, have a very short life span of typically one day, dedicated to mating and laying eggs.

This specimen was nearing the end of life but was regrettably being harassed by a European Wasp *Vespula germanica*, a poignant reminder that the circle of life in nature can be unpleasant at times.



We continued to where we had a view of the pedestrian access tunnel under the Western Freeway. We marvelled at the photographs Elva shared of the flood in October 2022 showing

water flowing through the tunnel and reflected on the depth of water above the area where we were standing.

On the way back to the cars, the Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis* was heard in the distance and added to the sightings of the Spotted Pardalote *Paradalotus punctatus*, Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* and the Woodswallows *Artamus sp.* that flew past well above the tree canopy.

The group returned to the carpark, extracted their cars from the tight parking area and headed to Gong Gong Reservoir Park. It was noted that we arrived at the lunch site ahead of time, a testament to Emily's organisation of the walks and perhaps body clocks not being reset from daylight savings time.

While those with larger lunches were eating, a couple of intrepid souls inspected the mulch and happily found no asbestos.

They were rewarded with Sulphur Tufts *Hypholoma fasciculare*, (right)



Red Edge Brittle Stem *Psathyrella corrugis* (left) and Inkcaps *Coprinellus sp.* growing in the mulch.

Suitably refreshed, the group headed to the Nerrina Historic Area at the end of Lofven Street. This was the site of a putrescible tip, closed in 1995 and restored to a parkland classification.

After negotiating the gate installed to prevent people from continuing to use the site as a tip, we walked along roadway flanked by blackberries and gorse and the detritus of tips, hoping without luck to spot a Square-tailed Kite known to frequent the area before we reached the bushland.

Emily spotted a low-growing Drooping Mistletoe on which she was able to demonstrate the difference to the Box Mistletoe *Amyema*

miquelii. The key difference was with the group of three flowers, with the central flower in the Drooping Mistletoe stalkless whereas the Box Mistletoe central flower has a stalk. We were left wondering how this is applied to a mistletoe 20m up a tree. We did get a good view of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters at the top of the poplar trees feeding on insects and a Spotted Pardalote was again observed flitting past.

The track took us into Grassy Dry Forest where the Trailing Shaggy-pea *Podolobium procumbens* was of note. Emily's research into the plant lists for the area only reported one orchid. Despite the group's efforts, no orchids were found despite promising looking terrain.



Grassy Dry
Forest, Nerrina
Historic Area

After passing through a weedy broom forest, the understorey opened out into lower sparse vegetation with the Hop Wattle *Acacia stricta* and several plants of Silver Wattle *Acacia dealbata*. The dense foliage of the occasional Cherry Ballart stood out like sentinels, in the open forest. A closer examination revealed the tiny green flowers on short dense inflorescences. The Red-anthered Wallaby-grass *Joycea pallida* was observed beside the track.

After an inspection of the dam which had significantly increased in level after the recent rains, we proceeded along a section of the Goldfields Track until reaching Pipeline Track.

A scraggy nest spotted in the upper branches was thought to be that of the Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* which were frequenting the area.

The group wended their way back to the cars and Emily was thanked for both her guidance and gems of wisdom on the day and her efforts scoping out the excursion.

Max Thompson

**Excerpts from the FNCB Meeting Minutes April 5th 2024
7.30pm, Held in person and via Zoom**

Opening and Apologies

Chairperson Andrew Arnold welcomed 18 members in person and eight members attending via Zoom.

Apologies: S. Cartledge, S. Faull, M. Moravec & V. Hocking

Minutes of the Previous Meeting accepted

Business Arising from Previous Club Meeting Nil

Correspondence Report accepted

Business Arising from Correspondence:

Congratulations to Club member John Petheram and Lorraine Huddle upon receiving acknowledgement from the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria that their nomination (which included the 300-page research document “Creswick Goldfield Water Distribution Heritage Precinct” by Huddle, Petheram and Tolhurst 2024) has been accepted for consideration for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register.

FNCB’s membership of the Entomological Society of Victoria has been renewed.

The Entomological Society of Victoria AGM will be held on Tues. 16th April from 7.30pm (including a Zoom option). Andy offered to attend as a representative of FNCB.

Considered Club submissions/ feedback on the Draft Ballarat Biodiversity Strategy: Healing Country Together, consultation on the State Forests in the Central Highlands Region and the Parks Victoria Volunteer Strategy 2024-28. Given the short time-frames for review and feedback for each document, Neville suggested that we prioritise providing feedback on the Draft Ballarat Biodiversity Strategy given its particular local pertinence and the applicability of knowledge of Club members to the issues/ plans therein. Neville offered to collate a Club response. If members wish to contribute to this group response, please provide Neville (Email Neville@jhoddie.com.au) with your suggestions/ feedback for inclusion in the FNCB’s response. The compiled submission will be assessed by the FNCB Committee at their next meeting on Tuesday 23rd April. Please feel encouraged to submit individual responses to any or all of these important guiding documents.

Reports:

Treasurer's Report

Opening bal. as at Mar. 1, 2024: \$8,502.19

Income \$1,096.89

Expenses: \$411.85

Closing bal.: \$9,187.23

The Treasurer's Report was accepted & tabled invoices approved for payment.

P.S. Please don't forget to renew your membership if you haven't already done so.

N.B. Kathy let members know \$1,500 has been transferred from the Club's operational (cheque) account (where it earns negligible interest) into the Club's interest-bearing investment account. It won't be accessible for three months but more than \$5,800 of Club funds remain accessible in the event that they are needed for something like the publishing of the new edition of "Discovering Ballarat's Bushland".

Kathy also let members know that Carol had given David Hocking \$75.00 as a small contribution to the time he has invested recently in putting together a full colour map with all sites featured in the new edition of "Discovering Ballarat's Bushland", to be included as the centre page in the book.

Motion: That FNCB reimburse Carol the \$75.00 as a legitimate expense in the production of the new edition of "Discovering Ballarat's Bushland".

Moved: K. Elder

Seconded: M. Rich

Carried.

General Business

Sunday 7th April field trip, 9.30am – 4pm: Ditchfield Lane including Ditchfield Bushland Reserve plus Nerrina Historic Area, led by Emily Noble.

Our Calendar of Activities for 2024-25 has been circulated to members. Neville mentioned that he has now had a chance to discuss the possibility of observing the bushfire recovery/ regeneration at Mt Cole in July with a staff member from the responsible land management agency and they confirmed that it is possible and they will assist in identifying suitable locations for a field trip. Neville led a discussion about FNCB advocating in writing for Lake Goldsmith Wildlife Reserve to be removed from the list of permitted sites for this Duck-shooting season (due to start on April 10). Emily noted that she would be catching up with several members of

BirdLife Ballarat the following day and would discuss the possibility of a joint submission with them given that BirdLife Ballarat had recently had a field trip to Lake Goldsmith and recorded several significant birds during their visit.

Show & Tell/ Field Reports

Carol highly recommended listening to a fascinating ABC podcast featuring forest ecologist Professor David Lindenmayer speaking about his remarkable life.

*

Roger reported 496 (or thereabouts) Flying Foxes currently roosting high up in deciduous trees in Ballarat Botanical Gardens, noting that they are very active in the morning if it is sunny, holding their wings widespread to warm them. The Gardens have never hosted a colony before, with only one or two very occasional sightings of a single Flying Fox in the past. Andy added that Flying Foxes were discussed in the recent SWIFFT webinar which was recorded and should be available on the SWIFFT website in the near future.

*

Claire told us about her delightful recent opportunity to hold an injured Sugar Glider and feed it with cantaloupe segments at the vet set up in the same building as her daughters' new medical practice.

Special Item: Member's Images- Wilderness

John G., Carol, Claire & Peter and John P. kindly popped a few images onto a USB and brought them along to the meeting, sharing some interesting stories about them with members. They took us from the Australian desert to the east coast of Greenland, back to the desert and then all over the place (thanks to John P's use of artificial intelligence to select photos from his computer's archive) from the Zimbabwean scene to Creswick to the Andes, the Fleurieu Peninsula and Mt Arapiles. These members are to write-up their own presentations for the May newsletter.

Next Meeting: "Capturing the history of Victoria's Field Naturalists Clubs" to be presented by Nicole Kearney, Biodiversity Heritage Library Australia.

When? Friday 3rd May 2024, 7.30pm in person at the Federation University building at the corner of Gillies St & Gregory St, Wendouree or via Zoom if you prefer.

Meeting closed: 9.16pm.

REMINDER - Have you paid your membership for 2024?

Thank you to all those members from 2023 who have renewed their membership of FNCB for 2024.

If you wish to remain a member please pay as soon as possible or send a quick email to elder17kathy@gmail.com to let me know that you won't be renewing and then I won't need to send you an email to ask!

Thank you from Kathy Elder, Treasurer FNCB

Ordinary Member (Adult) \$35 Distant Member \$20
Family \$55 Student Member \$15 Newsletter Postage \$13.20

Preferred Payment Method is by direct deposit,

Our bank account details as follows:

Account Name: Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Inc.

BSB: 633 000 Account Number: 119 112 290

Reference: Your Name

Arrangements for the Sunday May 5th Field Trip-

- 9.30am –3pm: “La Gerche Trail, Creswick”- to be led by John Gregurke and John Petheram

Meet in the Fed Uni carpark on corner of Gillies and Gregory St for carpooling/ convoy and departure at 9.30am sharp

*OR at the carpark at start of the La Gerche Trail along Sawpit Road, Creswick at 9.50am.

*Depending on weather, we'll have lunch in the grounds of the Parks Victoria office (no toilets) or nearer to Melbourne Uni Campus. We will walk and do light work along the popular 2.2 km walking Trail, which commemorates the life and work of John La Gerche. La Gerche was one of the Forest Bailiffs who helped to establish a forest nursery and restore forest damaged by mining between Creswick and Ballarat in the 1880s-.Forestry Students built the trail in the 1990s and FNCB Members refurbished the trail and signage in 2015, with Parks Victoria and a grant.

Please wear working clothes and footwear and bring gloves and rain gear and picnic lunch. Most of our work will be cleaning existing signage, and labels on plants. Some signs need cleaning or mould removal and clearing of excess branches. Please bring gloves, cleaning cloth or light scourers or brushes, and your favourite cleaning liquid. We will have some secateurs and pruning saws and light

hoes for cleaning weeds and vegetation around sign posts.

After lunch some members may like to drive back to Ballarat along gravel roads east of La Gerche Gully, to look at parts of the Creswick (mountain bike) Trails Project being built by Hepburn Shire, with a short walk around Eatons Dam and/or St Georges Lake. Any questions - please contact John Gregurke 0408 353 671, or John Petheram 0413 031 136.

Our Next Club Meeting May 3rd

Guest Speaker Nicole Kearney will present
The Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL): Capturing the history of Victoria's Field Naturalists Clubs

Bio

Nicole Kearney manages the Australian branch of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL). She works with libraries and publishers across Australia to digitise their biodiversity literature and make it accessible and discoverable. Nicole is passionate about open access and the importance of historic literature in our understanding of how biodiversity has changed over time.

Abstract

The Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) is the world's largest virtual library of biodiversity literature and archival material. It is a global consortium of over 590 contributors who have together digitised 61 million pages of biodiversity knowledge, all of which is freely accessible online.

BHL Australia began operation in 2010 with just one organisation, Museums Victoria. We now digitise and upload material on behalf of 50 organisations across the country. These organisations include Australia's museums, herbaria, state libraries, universities, royal societies, government agencies, field naturalist clubs and other natural history clubs and societies.

In 2023, BHL Australia received a grant from the Public Record Office Victoria to include the publications of Victoria's Field Naturalist Clubs in this global online resource. We're thrilled that the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat has agreed to be a part of this project. This talk will introduce the Biodiversity Heritage Library and will then share the progress of our *Capturing the history of Victoria's Field Naturalists* project thus far.

Meetings and Excursions

Fri May 3rd Club Meeting Speaker Nicole Kearney Biodiversity Heritage Library *Capturing the history of Victoria's FNCs*

Sun May 5th Field trip La Gerche Trail Creswick- walk and working bee. Leaders John Gregurke and John Petheram

Future events

Fri June 7th Speaker Sarah Lloyd OAM Fungimap inc *Slime moulds at Black Sugarloaf*

Sun June 9th Leader-Les Hanrahan Fungi -location to be advised

Volunteers needed to write up these events for our newsletter.

Next Committee meeting Tues. 28th May at 7.30 pm by Zoom

**Club meetings are normally held on 1st Friday of the month at 7.30 pm at the Federation Uni Gillies St Campus (corner of Gillies and Gregory Sts, Lake Wendouree),
Committee**

Website: <http://fieldnatballarat.wordpress.com>

Club email: ballaratfnc@gmail.com

Meetings - in person and may continue to be held via Zoom.
Members will be kept informed of arrangements each month.

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